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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to describe the differences found between males and females in factors alleviating (or not alleviating) the stresses and problems that many times accompany divorce. The data were collected by administering a questionnaire to Parents Without Partners chapters in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area and the Norfolk-Hampton, Virginia metropolitan area in the spring and summer of 1973. The completed sample of 277 contained middle class, female, and White biases. While not a prior hypothesis, it was found that females perceived themselves as experiencing greater stress than males. Other results from the hypotheses tested were: (1) Social participation - males participated socially more than females and experienced less stress, (2) Open or closed mindedness - females' stress but not males' was lessened by being more open minded, (3) Sexual permissiveness - males were more sexually permissive than females, but for both groups, the higher the sexual permissiveness, the lower the stress, (4) Occupational status - males perceived less stress with higher occupational statuses, (5) Orientation to Change - females more tolerant of change in the larger society perceived much less stress; for males there was no relationship. Possible reasons for these differences are discussed and implications for future research explored. (Author)

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SEX DIFFERENCES IN VOLUNTARY POST MARITAL DISSOLUTION ADJUSTMENT*

BY HELEN J. RASCHKE**

PAPER PREPARED FOR PRESENTATION AT THE AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION ANNUAL MEETING, NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK
AUGUST, 1976

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INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM:

What happens to individuals after divorce has been relatively neglected in sociological empirical research since pioneering studies by Waller in 1930 and Goode in 1956.

In brief, Goode found (1) that most of his divorced mothers suffered trauma, but that time alleviated it and most made the necessary adjustments so that "the roles accepted and assigned do not take the prior divorce into account as the primary point of reference", and (2) a large majority of his respondents felt they were better off in most ways as a result of their divorces and that their children were better off (1956).

Divorce itself has been studied theoretically and empirically from a variety of different perspectives, including divorce as an index of social organization (Faris, 1955; Pinard, 1966; Scanzoni, 1965, 1966); as an index of family disorganization or disintegration (Mowrer, 1932; Burgess and Locke, 1953; Elliot and Merrill, 1961; Winch, 1963; Kirkpatrick, 1963); as an index of personal disorganization and/or pathology (Waller, 1930; Loeb and Price, 1966; Blumenthal, 1967; Ackerman, 1969; Chester, 1972), and as a necessary adjunct to our contemporary family system to relieve the pressure of unworkable marriages (Goode, 1956; Goode, 1961; Hunt, 1966; O'Neill, 1967; Reis, 1971).

In addition a large volume of statistical research has been published using census data and other secondary sources of data describing patterns of divorce by age, race, education, occupation, income, etc. (Monahan, 1940; Jacobson, 1950; Glick, 1957; Carter and Plateris, 1963; Carter and Glick, 1970; Renne, 1971; HEW, 1976) and legal (statutory) and nonlegal (actual) causes of divorce (Mowrer, 1924; Baber, 1939; Harmsworth and Minnis, 1955; Davis, 1957; Kay, 1970).

There have been some recently published books on the actual postdivorce adjustment process, often written by marriage and divorce counselors or social workers and based on the case study method (e.g. Kranzler, 1973; Fisher, 1974; Epstein, 1974; Gettleman and Markowitz, 1974; Hardy and Cull, 1974; Weiss, 1975). These books vary in quality and orientation but most have the common theme of attempting to change the image of divorce from negative to positive or from a destructive experience to a constructive experience.

IMPORTANCE OF THE PROBLEM AND PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY:

The period after a separation and/or divorce need not be a problem at all, but a time of constructive, innovative personal growth and self-actualization. This point is made in Kranzler (1973), Fisher (1974) and is especially well argued by Gettleman and Markowitz (1974). However, this is not true for all individuals and the period immediately following the physical separation of a couple can be most disrupting and traumatic, even to the individual who did want the separation (Goode, 1956). This is the period of the actual critical role transitions--with each spouse giving up roles and/or taking on new roles in their new positions (statuses) of living separated and anticipating divorce.

The divorce rate per 1,000 married persons (15 years and over) has gradually risen from 1.2 in 1860 to over 19 in 1975, and has been accelerating since the mid-1960's (Raschke, 1974; HEW, 1976). The crude rate has now reached 5 divorces per 1,000 population (HEW, 1976). The divorce rate now is exceeding the all-time record set in 1946 immediately after World War II.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to attempt to determine some of the characteristics or factors associated with slow or rapid, difficult or easy, adjustment after separation or divorce. The major question to be answered is "why do some individuals, given the same objective divorce circumstances, recover from the resulting disruption of role sets faster and easier than others?" This particular paper will focus on differences between males and females in what happens after divorce.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT POSTDIVORCE ADJUSTMENT RESEARCH LITERATURE:

The pioneer who first blazed a trail in this wilderness area of what happens to the individual after divorce was Willard Waller, whose book, The Old Love and the New: Divorce and Readjustment, published in 1930, remains a classic today. Waller concluded that almost all of the divorced people he studied suffered severe trauma and disorganization.

The first major large scale sociological field study of postdivorce adjustment, using structure-function and role theory, was done by William J. Goode. He is the contemporary sociologist who has done the most sociological research and writing on postdivorce adjustment, going from macro-theory (structure-function) on the societal level to micro-theory (role) on the individual level showing how they are related and interdependent. Goode's study, which culminated in Women in Divorce (1956), used all the standard sociological variables and used them to produce a wealth of data.

Twenty-five years after Goode's study, Barringer (1973) did a mailed questionnaire of divorced individuals. He found that, for the most part, his respondents, both male and female, were satisfied with the quality of their postdivorce life, although there were some differences between males and females.

METHODOLOGY:

Variables:

Adjustment, a concept that theorists of various bents have found difficult to define conceptually, for this study will build on Goode's definition of postdivorce adjustmental process as:

> ...one by which a disruption of role sets and patterns and of existing social relations, is incorporated into the individual's life pattern, such that the roles accepted and assigned do not take the prior divorce into account as the primary point of reference (Goode, 1956:19).

This definition, using role theory concepts, will guide the analysis in the present research.

For purposes of this study, adjustment, or the lack of it, will be operationally defined as the score obtained on the postdivorce problems and stress scale constructed especially for this research. The subdimensions of the stress scale along with some of the questions are listed in Appendix A.

Independent variables include standard background factors, objective factors in the marriage and subsequent divorce, social psychological factors, normative considerations, and degree of participation in roles outside the home.

The measurement instrument is a questionnaire composed of 273 items (which is available on request). Pearson's correlation and partial correlation techniques are used for the data analysis to be reported in this paper.

SAMPLE:

The sample is composed of Parents Without Partners (hereafter referred to as PWP) chapter organizations from the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area. The sample is non-random, with white, middle class, and female biases. The data were collected in the spring and summer of 1973. The total N=277, females=186 and males=91. The mean age for the sample was 40.

RESULTS OF TESTING THE STUDY HYPOTHESES:

A few of the hypotheses which were tested are summarized below, after which male-female differences will be examined. See Raschke (1974) for the rationales these hypotheses are based on.

Hypothesis 1: The more social interaction and/or involvement outside the home, with relatives, friends, in organizations, etc., as measured by the social participation scale, the lower will be the stress associated with the separation and/or divorce. This hypothesis was supported at the .001 level, i.e., the greater the participation, the lower the stress.

Hypothesis 2: The greater the sexual permissiveness of the divorced person, the lower will be the post separation and/or postdivorce stress. Sexual permissiveness is measured by a modification of Reiss' Scale (1967). This hypothesis was supported at the .03 level.

Hypothesis 3: The higher the occupational status, the lower will be the stress for both males and females and the easier the transition from married to divorced status.

For both males and females combined this hypothesis was not supported, but there were male-female differences.

Hypothesis 4: The lower the score on the Orientation to Change Scale, the lower will be the post separation or postdivorce stress and/or easier will be the role transition from married to divorced status.

The Orientation to Change Scale is the seven-item version of the original scale developed by Neal (1965). For the total sample this hypothesis was supported at the .02 level.

MALE-FEMALE DIFFERENCES AND POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS

Even though it was not a specific hypothesis, the general, overall differences between males and females on the postdivorce adjustment stress scale should be reported. A "t-test" for difference between means was calculated; the results were "t" = 2.12, DF = 275, statistically significant. This is an indication of higher total stress for females than for males in the sample of the present study.[1]

Hypothesis 1: Social participation: The data show that the rate of social participation fluctuates somewhat for both males and females until the third year after the physical separation. Table 1 shows that during the first six months after the separation social participation is at a low ebb for both males and females.[2]

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[1]In other research, male-female differences have not been consistent predictors of satisfaction with life. While Kutner, et al (1956) found women to be happier with life than men, the bulk of published data indicates no difference in satisfaction by sex (Bradburn, 1969; Palmore and Luikart, 1972; Edwards and Klemmack, 1973). Durkheim found no consistent differences between widowed males and widowed females:

> ...the sex enjoying the higher coefficient of preservation in the state of widowhood varies from society to society...(1951:180).

Therefore, the data in the present study are not consistent with data from other studies that show no consistent differences between males and females.

[2]There was a possible range of from seven (highest social participation) to twenty-eight (lowest). This is because the social participation scale is composed of seven items with four possible answers: 1 = highest social participation and 4 = lowest.

Table I: Mean Rate of Social Participation by Months Since Physical Separation

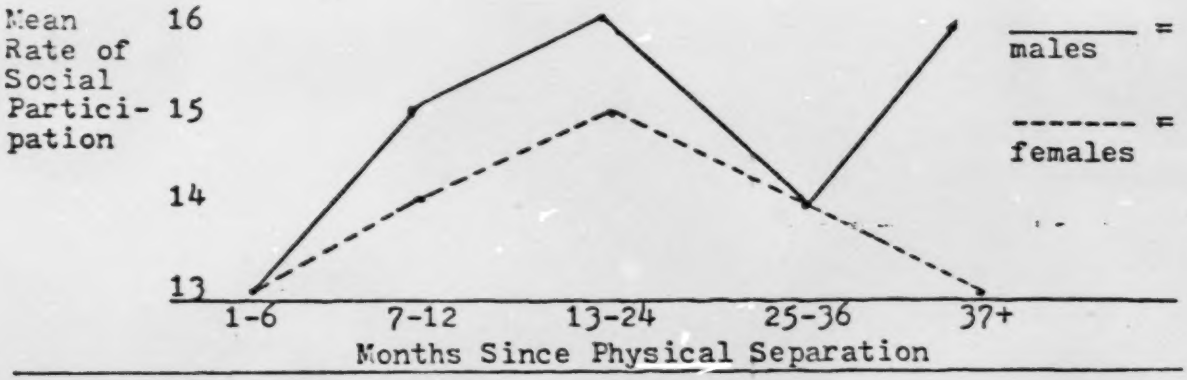
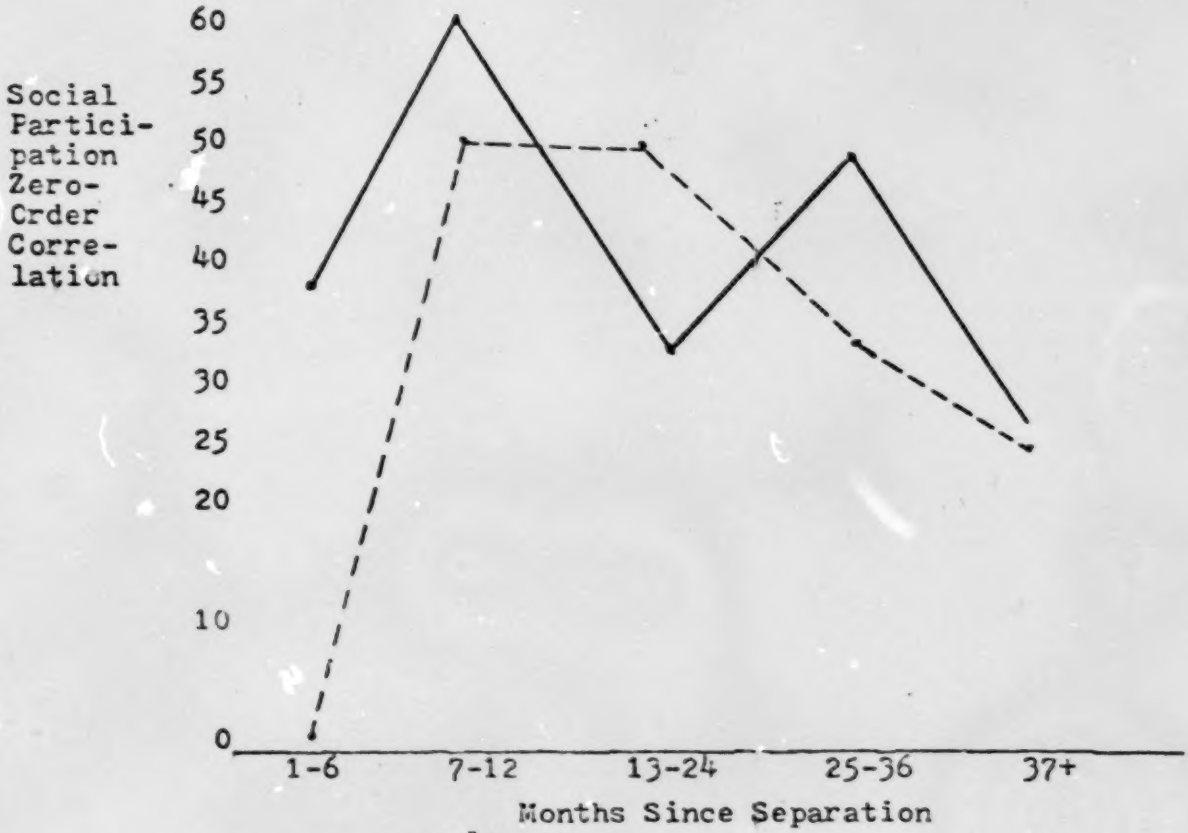


Table II: Male and Female Social Participation Zero-Order Correlations with Postdivorce Stress by Months Since Physical Separation



Note: Each six months or one year period has only one point - the large dot

During the seven to twenty-four month period, the level of participation rises for both sexes but more rapidly for males than for females. During the 15 to 36 month period it drops from the previous period and is the same for males and females.

The significant difference comes after the third year when female social participation drops to the same level it was the first six months, but male social participation again rises to what it was in the 13 to 24 month period. The difference between the means of males and females for this time period is statistically significant. Except for the second year, females' social participation is always lower than males'. Possible reasons for this will be discussed later in this section.

It is interesting to note that the initial reaction of both males and females to the crisis of the physical separation is very low social participation for the first six months. After they have absorbed the initial shock, if the separation comes as one, their participation climbs steeply the second six months after the separation, more steeply for males than for females.

Table II shows the zero-order correlations between stress and social participation for both males and females by months since physical separation. In the initial crisis period of the six months after separation, social participation was not at all important for females but was somewhat important for males in reducing their level of stress. After the initial crisis period, for both sexes, the more they participated, the lower their reported stress level. The importance of social participation remains at this degree of importance for females throughout the second year. As time goes on social participation becomes less important, even though at the end of the third year the effect of participation is fairly strong for both males and females.

Males participate significantly more in social activities than females. A "t-test" for difference between means of the social participation scale for

males and females was calculated, and found statistically significant. This again reveals the greater amount of social participation on the part of the males.

This difference in social participation is probably influenced by the greater opportunity for making sociability contacts on the part of the males and perhaps by greater loneliness as will be discussed later. Because males work outside the home and because they usually do not have custody of their children, their opportunity and available time for social participation is enhanced.

On the other hand, most females have custody of their children and in fact must fill the dual roles of mother and father. Without the help of husbands, these roles can be very time consuming as well as emotionally, and/or mentally exhausting. In addition, our family kinship structure does not provide much, if any kind of substantial help for the divorced parent who has custody of the children. Norms for this kind of help have been very slow in developing, probably because of the stigma placed on divorce, until recently, by a large portion of our society. In the present study most of the respondents reported they received only minimal support, primarily just emotional support, from their relatives. Thus, females, subjected to this type of "role strain" may not have the necessary time to participate in social roles outside the home. In this context, "role strain" means the female is attempting to fill the roles in the father position as well as maternal roles. She would have too many roles for her time, energy, and other resources. "Role strain" also means that conflicts could develop among the various roles in the mother and/or father positions. Therefore, "role strain" could certainly inhibit social participation.

For Hypothesis 2 - Sexual permissiveness - zero-order correlations show that males and older people perceive themselves as having less stress and as being more sexually permissive. When partial correlations were computed controlling for sex

and age, the correlation between sexual permissiveness and stress remained significant. The higher the sexual permissiveness, the lower the stress. However, there is a significant male-female difference. The zero-order correlation between sex and sexual permissiveness indicated males were much more sexually permissive than females. This is not surprising, in view of the double standard of sexual morality which this generation of individuals were reared under, and which still exists to some extent today, although, for some groups of people, it is diminishing.

Hypothesis 3 - Occupational status - for males the zero-order correlation between occupational status and stress was significant. For males, a higher occupational status indicates less stress. The reverse is true for females, although not quite statistically significant. This would point in the direction of more stress with higher occupational status for females. The relationship between occupational status and stress seems obvious; higher occupational status permits a higher standard of living generally (more money) and would enable these males to participate socially more, if they wanted to, which in turn, has been shown to reduce stress. The opposite direction for females - more stress with higher occupational status - could indicate greater responsibilities perhaps leading to greater stress in their jobs which then carries over into their lives in general.

Hypothesis 4 - Orientation to Change - was the most interesting in terms of differences between males and females. It will be recalled that for the entire sample the hypothesis was supported at .02 level. However, for the females, the zero-order correlation was highly significant while for the males this correlation was not significant. This indicates that females have a much higher tolerance for change, not only in their own lives, but in the community and society external to them. It was originally assumed that this kind of tolerance for change would have some influence on post separation or postdivorce stress and role transition

from married to divorced status, because this transition involves many and diverse changes in life styles, role taking, and role creating. It was assumed that an individual's general orientation toward change would affect his/her specific orientation toward change.

Reasons for this great difference between males and females could be tied into the Women's Liberation Movement - which for many women is a larger, societal movement and does not always affect them directly and personally, although the implicit, if not explicit goals, are to make the lives of females "better". Males in this sample (mean age = 40) could have been (probably were) more traditional and wanted to keep the "status quo".

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH RELATED TO FINDINGS REPORTED IN THIS PAPER:

For this researcher, many issues have been left unanswered because of the biases and limitations of the methodology and data.

Perhaps on a more abstract level, the question might be raised as to whether postdivorce adjustment stress is unique from other kinds of stress and if one should be looking for unique ways to alleviate it. The consistent finding from many empirical research studies has been the relationship between social participation and greater or lesser satisfaction with life (Wilson, 1967:304). A case could be made for lesser or greater satisfaction with life being somewhat conceptually equivalent to lesser or greater stress. Therefore, it would be interesting to know if the same kinds and ways of social participation which are effective in increasing satisfaction with life are also effective in decreasing postdivorce adjustment stress.

On a less abstract level, and related to the issues addressed in this paper, differences between males and females in postdivorce adjustment - empirical research is especially needed to determine the reasons females participate socially less than males. Reasons for this were discussed and are supported in the literature in

tangentially related ways but not specifically to postdivorce adjustment stress. Females currently bear the heaviest burden of child rearing, and it seems immensely important to this researcher to find ways to alleviate the stress (of those who experience it) not only for the females' own emotional-psychological well-being but also for that of their children. Studies by Nye (1957), Burchinal (1964), and Raschke (1976) give empirical support to children being better off, i.e., better social and personal adjustment, in peaceful single-parent families than in conflict-ridden intact families.

Sexual permissiveness is somewhat related to social participation except for the traditional double standard attached to it. Much research is being done in this area and divorce counselors are dealing with this subject much more freely now as compared to even five years ago.

The relationship of postdivorce stress to occupational status had opposite results for males and females and reasons for these were discussed. However, there is no empirical research (to this researcher's knowledge) dealing directly with occupational status and postdivorce stress. With lesser alimony being awarded, it is becoming increasingly important for a female to be economically self-sufficient in more "self-actualizing" positions in the work world.

As commented earlier, the most interesting and puzzling was the difference between males and females in their Orientation to Change and the relationship to postdivorce adjustment stress. Possible reasons were discussed, but again, none have been empirically tested. Females who were more tolerant of general societal change experienced less stress. It would then seem logical that high "status quo" females would be low on tolerance to general societal change and high on stress. This needs further research.

SUMMARY

This paper has reported the differences found between males and females in the hypotheses tested. These included (1) Social participation (males participate more and have less stress); (2) Sexual permissiveness (males are more sexually permissive than females but for both groups, the higher the sexual permissiveness, the less the stress level); (3) Occupational level (males perceive less stress with higher occupational levels, females more); (4) Orientation to Change (females more tolerant of change perceive much less stress; for males there was no relationship). (5) Postdivorce adjustment stress - while not a specific hypothesis - females perceived themselves as experiencing considerably more stress than males. Possible reasons for these differences were discussed and implications for future research commented upon.

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APPENDIX A: SUBDIMENSIONS OF THE STRESS SCALE

(Subdimension 1-A shown in detail here; others outlined. Complete set of scales available on request.)

1. Perceived, Unpleasant, Unfavorable Emotional States:

A. Depression:

99) In regard to fatigue now, as compared to before the separation:
1. My fatigue has decreased.
2. I had some fatigue before and there has been no change since.
3. I had much fatigue before and there has been no change since.
4. My fatigue has increased.
5. Not applicable - I have never experienced much fatigue.

104) As compared to before the separation, in general how would you say you feel most of the time now - in higher or lower spirits?
1. I am in higher spirits.
2. I was in reasonably good spirits before and there has been no change.
3. I was in rather poor spirits before and there has been no change.
4. I am in lower spirits.

106) In regard to feelings of apathy and/or indifference now as compared to before the separation:
1. These feelings have increased.
2. These feelings have decreased.
3. I definitely had these feelings before and there has been no change since.
4. Not applicable - I have never had these feelings.

109) In regard to feelings of depression now as compared to before the separation:
1. These feelings have increased.
2. These feelings have decreased.
3. I definitely had these feelings before and there has been no change since.
4. Not applicable - I never had these feelings.

111) In regard to serious suicide thoughts now as compared to before the separation:
1. These thoughts have increased.
2. These thoughts have decreased.
3. I definitely had these thoughts before and there has been no change since.
4. Not applicable - I have never had suicide thoughts.

126) As compared to before the separation, do you feel more or less downcast and/or dejected?
1. These feelings have increased.
2. These feelings have decreased.
3. I definitely had these feelings before and there has been no change since.
4. Not applicable - I have never had these feelings.

APPENDIX A - continued:

119) In regard to feelings of lack of purpose in life now as compared to before the separation:
1. These feelings have increased.
2. These feelings have decreased.
3. I definitely had these feelings before and there has been no change since.
4. Not applicable - I have never had these feelings.

B. Emotional Turmoil (eight items)

C. Loneliness (four items)

D. Guilt (three items)

E. Goode's Trauma Items (six items)

2. Perceived Satisfaction With New Roles:

A. As a Single Parent (two items)

B. As a Friend (one item)

C. As a Worker on A Job or Homemaker (four items)

D. As a Date (two items)

E. As a Club or Organization Member (two items)

F. As a Former Spouse (five items)

3. Perceived Ability to Fulfill or Deal with New Roles:

A. As a Single Parent (four items)

B. As a Friend (two items)

C. As a Worker on a Job or Homemaker (six items)

D. As a Date (one item)

E. As a Former Spouse (two items)

F. As a Club or Organization Member (one item)